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ACTION ARA-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 18288

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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PHUM, KJUS, PTER, CO
SUBJECT: SEGOVIA MASSACRE: ARMY AND POLICE COMMANDERS
CHARGED WITH ACTS OF OMISSION

REF: A) BOGOTA 17064; B) BOGOTA 17389

1. (C) SUMMARY: A CIVILIAN OFFICIAL HAS FORMALLY CHARGED THE LOCAL ARMY AND POLICE COMMANDERS IN SEGOVIA, ANTIOQUIA WITH FAILING IN THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT THE TOWN DURING A NOVEMBER 11 RAMPAGE WHICH LEFT OVER 40 PEOPLE DEAD (REFTELS). THE WORDING OF THE CHARGES CAN BE INTERPRETED TO MEAN THAT EITHER THE SECURITY FORCES ARE LAZY, COWARDLY AND INEFFICIENT, OR THAT THEY KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND TURNED A BLIND
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EYE, OR THAT THERE WAS ACTIVE COLLUSION BETWEEN THE OFFICERS AND THE KILLERS. BOTH OFFICERS HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED FOLLOWING THE ATTACK AND NOW FACE DISCIPLINARY ACTION. THE INVESTIGATION IS CONTINUING.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
DATE/CASE ID: 28 APR 2004 200400772

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END SUMMARY

2. (U) THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL RESPONSIBLE FOR OVERSEEING THE ARMED FORCES, SALVADOR BETANCUR, CHARGED THAT THE ARMY COMMANDER OF A SMALL BASE NEAR SEGOVIA, MAJOR MARCO HERNANDEZ BAEZ GARZON, HAD 127 MEN AT HIS DISPOSAL BUT DID NOTHING TO PROTECT THE TOWN DURING THE 50 MINUTES THAT 12 GUNMEN WERE SHOOTING IT UP. THE CHARGE AGAINST THE ARMY MAJOR ALSO FOCUSES ON THE ESCAPE ROUTE OF THE KILLERS, WHO HAD TO DRIVE PAST SEVERAL FORTIFIED ARMY POSITIONS WITH NIGHT FIGHTING CAPABILITIES.

3. (U) AS REPORTED IN THE PRESS, THE CHARGE AGAINST THE POLICE COMMANDER, CAPTAIN JORGE ELIECER CHACON, WHO HAD 16 MEN ON DUTY, READ: "YOU ISSUED NO ORDER TO THE MEN UNDER YOUR COMMAND TO GIVE CHASE TO OR TO APPREHEND THE ATTACKERS, OR TO STOP THEIR FIRING; THESE CRIMINALS WERE OPERATING WITHIN A FEW METERS OF YOUR POST; YOU AND YOUR MEN HAD SUFFICIENT ARMS, AMMUNITION, AND TWO OPERATIONAL VEHICLES AT YOUR SERVICE." THE PRESS REPORTS NOTE THAT OTHER POLICE AND ARMY MEMBERS ARE SUSPECTED OF HAVING INTIMIDATED THE POPULATION.

4. (U) ACCORDING TO MEDIA ACCOUNTS, THE POLICE COMMANDER HAD OCCUPIED THE SEGOVIA POST ONLY A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE ATTACK, AND WAS TRANSFERRED IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER. THE ARMY MAJOR WAS IN CHARGE BECAUSE THE COLONEL HAD LEFT SHORTLY BEFORE THE MASSACRE FOR UNSPECIFIED MEDICAL TREATMENT. THE MAJOR WAS ALSO TRANSFERRED IMMEDIATELY
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AFTER THE EVENT.

5. (C) COMMENT: MUCH OF THE POPULATION OF SEGOVIA AND THE SURROUNDING REGION IS SYMPATHETIC TO THE GUERRILLAS WHO ARE ACTIVE IN THE AREA. RIGHT WING ARMED GANGS AND NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS ALSO OPERATE IN THE REGION. THE PRESS ACCOUNTS NOTED THAT BOTH THE ARMY AND POLICE HAD RECENTLY STAGED MOCK GUERRILLA ATTACKS ON THE TOWN AND WERE PREPARED TO FIGHT BACK IN THAT EVENTUALITY. INVESTIGATIONS ARE ONGOING, INTO BOTH THE IDENTITY OF THE KILLERS AND THEIR CONNECTIONS TO THE SECURITY FORCES. THE INVESTIGATIONS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL COULD RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST THE OFFICIALS. IN THE PAST THIS HAS BEEN A LENGTHY PROCESS RESULTING IN LIGHT SANCTIONS. HOWEVER, JUDICIAL

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INVESTIGATIONS ARE ALSO UNDERWAY.

6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: FIRST BRIGADE COMMANDER SALCEDO USED THE SAME EVENTS TO EXPLAIN TO POLCOUNS NOVEMBER 19 WHY THE POLICE AND MILITARY WERE NOT ACCOMPLICES. HE SAID THAT SINCE THE POLICE COMMANDER WAS A RECENT ARRIVAL TO THE REGION, HE HAD NOT HAD TIME TO MAKE CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL VIGILANTE GROUPS. IN ADDITION, PREVIOUS GUERRILLA ATTACKS AND AMBUSHES HAD MADE TAKING COVER, RATHER THAN AGGRESSIVE COUNTER ACTION, THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR THE POLICE ONCE FIRING STARTED. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE MANY YET-TO-BE-ANSWERED QUESTIONS IN THE ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS MCNAMARA

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